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# THE BALLAD OF HATTONCHATEL

By  
CHARLES LOUIS SFEGER



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THE BALLAD  
OF HATTONCHATEL





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CHARLES LOUIS SEEGER

NEW YORK

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To  
MISS BELLE SKINNER  
REBUILDER OF HATTONCHATEL

MISS BELLE SKINNER

## REBUILDER OF HATTONCHATEL



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## INVOCATION





## INVOCATION

O MUSES nine!  
Deign to confer upon a worshipper most humble  
A tiny fraction of your powers divine!  
That may enable him at least to mumble  
A few poor words that shall not quite displease  
A certain gracious Lady.  
I was wont to tease  
Her on her infelicity in explorations  
Of the highways that traverse our sweet France;  
Highways, albeit shady  
And straight and smooth, that terminate in bifurca-  
tions,  
Tempting fair woman to leave all to chance  
And wander off the map

In quest of what it insufficiently denotes.  
But oh ! I rue the day that ever I did dare  
To treat with levity one who devotes  
Herself to work beneficent. I would not care

A rap,

If she were formed of coarser clay,  
But, when it comes to making fun  
Of one whose wings are sprouting, I must say  
It's shocking taste, and so I have begun

To write a ballad

About the Blessing of a Bell  
And other countless blessings that befell  
At picturesque Hattonchâtel;  
And last, but by no means the least,  
A most incomparable feast,

From soup to salad.

So, Muses all,—

Or almost all,—do help me pen my lay !

Clio, thou most adorable, make me veracious;

Calliope, bestow an epic strain, I pray;

Polymnia, grant rhythm to my lines, and gracious

Melpomene, spread piously a pall

Upon the tragedy that havoc made

Of the fair town whose fête I will relate.

Erato, no, dear, run away,

I shall not need you, come another day.

My theme demands your sober sisters' aid,

To tune my lyre with science adequate.

O Muses ! Condescend to cast a spell

Upon the gentle giver of the Bell,

So that she may not wholly deprecate

These verses that to her I dedicate:

The simple BALLAD OF HATTONCHATEL.



# PART I



## PART I

**B**EFORE great Cæsar wrote of Gaul  
In Latin most correct,  
And filled his Commentaries all  
With discourse indirect,

That even now does still inspire  
The schoolboy's brain with hate  
And prompts the curious to inquire  
Why Brutus struck so late,—

Before brave Vercingetorix  
A Roman triumph graced,  
Or ere the rich Orgetorix  
Was sentenced and displaced,—

Before the Merovingians  
The crown of France had won,  
Or ever Carlovingians  
Beleaguered Carcassonne,—

Above the valley of the Meuse  
A hill rose, whence, they say,  
Rude warriors, clad in skins and furs  
Of beasts less fierce than they,

The far horizon scanned, in search  
Of an approaching foe,  
And, swooping from their airy perch,  
Pounced down on him below;

Or, if his forces were too great  
To meet in combat fair,  
They prudently did him await  
In their well-chosen lair



And greeted him with clouds of stones  
Or, haply, boiling oil;  
Then, careless of their victims' groans,  
Rushed down to claim their spoil.

A dismal age it was, forsooth,  
That prehistoric time,  
When chieftains rude and troops uncouth  
Were occupied in crime.

Hills were not valued in those days  
As outlooks picturesque,  
Wherefrom to view through rising haze  
The river's arabesque,

The valleys leading miles away,  
The forest's vast expanse,  
The meadows, 'decked with flowers gay  
Of sweet and sunny France.

For centuries those heights still frowned  
    Upon the plains below;  
Then feudal lords their summits crowned  
    With fortress and château,

Whose donjon, battlements and tower  
    Defied the foe with scorn,  
And Knighthood blossomed into flower  
    And Chivalry was born.

Now gentler manners held their sway;  
    Fair ladies graced the board  
And listened to the minstrel's lay.  
    No longer was the sword

The only weapon man did wield,  
    But eke the pen and lute,  
Wherewith to make his mistress yield  
    And crown his ardent suit.

That was a golden age, I ween,  
For maids and matrons too,  
When Thibaut wrote rhymes to the Queen  
And Aucassins did woo

His "douce amie" with courteous love,  
Despite a father's threat,  
And scorned the joys of Heav'n above  
For joy of Nicolette.

So passed the time right merrily  
'Twixt love and war and song  
And castled heights grew, verily,  
So numerous and strong

That king and ministers began  
To fume and fret and frown  
And wondered if their lords did plan  
Revolt against the crown.

A haughty Cardinal appeared  
At a convenient hour  
And very promptly interfered  
To stem the feudal power.

He chose a method most direct  
To check the nobles' pride,  
With gunpowder their châteaux wrecked  
And breached their ramparts wide.

And so to-day on wooded crest  
A tower or shattered wall  
Will oft the trav'ler's eye arrest  
And Richelieu recall.

But these are not the only towers  
That crown the hills of France,  
For, long before the feudal powers  
Had suffered dire mischance,

A builder far more competent  
To meet the test of time  
Had chosen sites most prominent  
Whereon to rear sublime

The sacred symbol of the Cross  
So all the world could see,  
For Holy Church was ne'er at loss  
To use publicity

For greater glory of Our Lord  
Or e'en a martyred saint,  
And now, as if with one accord,  
Rose spires and belfries quaint,

Whose bells the faithful called to mass,  
And, from the country round,  
Came rich and poor, of ev'ry class,  
Responsive to their sound.

Where'er a church on hilltop stood,  
    'Neath its maternal wing  
There nestled soon a little brood  
    Of red roofs, sheltering

The peasant folk, who tilled the soil  
    And pruned the fruitful vine,  
Nor e'er forgot, in hours of toil,  
    The Blessed Virgin's shrine.

They brought to Her the poppies red  
    That grew amidst the wheat  
And wreathed them round Her sacred head,  
    Or laid them at Her feet.

No errant knight nor paladin  
    Such courtesy displayed,  
Nor ever to an earthly queen  
    Such loyal homage paid

As Mary, Queen of Heav'n, received  
From high and low as well,  
Whose intercession, they believed,  
Would save their souls from Hell.

It was in this wise that the hill,  
These stanzas celebrate,  
Passed through succeeding epochs, till  
Its profile delicate,

Adorned with spire and Gothic arch,  
Stood out against the sky,  
A witness to the onward march  
Of peace and industry,

That beautified the fertile plain,—  
The battle-field of yore,—  
With yellow stretch of waving grain,  
Where banners waved before.

But naught in all the countryside  
In beauty can excel  
The village, seen from far and wide,  
White-walled Hattonchâtel.

A veritable diadem,  
It rests upon the brow  
Of Mother Earth. No costly gem  
Such setting has, I trow,

Nor half so flawlessly reflects  
The light that on it plays  
As, when Apollo first directs  
His horizontal rays

Upon the dull gray silhouette  
Of roofs and gables old,—  
It softens into violet,  
Then rose, then burnished gold.



The wayfarer, who passes by,  
Can scarce believe his eyes,  
For, there suspended in the sky,  
A fairy palace lies,

By mist translucent glorified,  
Through which its turrets shine,  
Like those that Wotan reared to hide  
The treasure of the Rhine;

Or like the castle that the wand  
Of Klingsor improvised,  
Where flower maids, with gesture fond,  
The "guileless fool" surprised.

E'en as Walhalla's stateliness  
And Klingsor's magic art  
Did vanish into nothingness  
When they had played their part,

The wayfarer's bright fantasy  
No longer can persist,  
As Phœbus' chariot climbs on high  
And drives away the mist,

Disclosing beauties new and real,  
Of all enchantment shorn,  
But challenging with mute appeal  
The glamour of the dawn.

And, when the sunset banners fly  
Across the floating wrack,  
The poplars cut the western sky  
With spikes of deepest black.

Those who Segovia have seen,  
Or proud Siena's site,  
May celebrate their noble mien  
And praise their lordly height,

But give me fair Hattonchâtel,  
Whose promontory bold  
Has been the valley's sentinel  
For centuries untold.

One August day, six years ago,  
It signalled the advance  
Of the hereditary foe  
For ravage of sweet France.

“Der Tag,”—the Junker's frequent toast,  
In arrogance conceived,—  
Had dawned, and justified the boast  
(At least, they so believed)

That they would dine on Christmas Day  
In Paris by the Seine  
And there confirm the Teuton's sway  
From Baltic Sea to Spain.

Across the Belgian frontier  
The gray-clad armies poured  
And marked each stage of their career  
With scourge of fire and sword,  
  
Proclaiming that a single cross,  
In haste erected o'er  
A German grave, meant greater loss  
Than that of Louvain's lore  
  
And all that Reims' Cathedral gave  
Of beauty to the world,  
Its sculptured portals, lofty nave,  
Where Joan of Arc unfurled  
  
The sacred oriflamme of France,  
As by her King she stood,  
His coronation to enhance  
With her brave maidenhood.

Can aught be found more typical  
Of the Teutonic brain?  
A mind more analytical  
Could never ascertain

Why, even if their claim was just  
And Art was held so cheap,  
They need exchange their precious dust  
Such harvest poor to reap!

The crosses of the German slain  
Stand not on German soil,  
In token of a duty plain  
To guard their homes from spoil;

No! Ev'ry one records a life  
In mad adventure lost,  
In vain invasion, senseless strife,  
Essayed at honor's cost.

By early victories misled,  
The German host pressed on  
To seize the prize they coveted  
And fancied they had won.

Beneath Napoleon's stately arch,  
Resounding with their tread,  
They pictured a triumphal march,  
The Kaiser at their head.

But e'en as 'twixt the cup and lip  
Mishap doth often lie,  
Fate gave them the proverbial slip  
And smote them hip and thigh

Upon the Marne's vast battle-field,  
Where first they learned to gauge  
The power that patriots can wield  
To save their heritage.

No less misfortune did they meet  
At the Grand Couronné,  
Where ignominious defeat  
Completed their dismay,

Frustrated their design to end  
The war in one campaign  
And forced the Teuton horde to spend  
Four years in which to gain—

Their object? No! In vain attempt  
To prove their vaunted might,  
They merely proved their own contempt  
For justice, truth and right,

Brought ruin on their Fatherland  
And wrought destruction dire  
On land and sea, with iron hand,  
More terror to inspire.

We all remember,—who were wont  
To follow anxiously  
The changes in the battle front  
From Belfort to the sea—

How, while elsewhere, with shot and shell,  
The foe were driven back,  
The salient of Saint-Mihiel  
Resisted all attack

And, threatening with apex keen  
To pierce the French defense,  
It symbolized the German mien  
Of boastful confidence.

Within that triangle, alas!  
Lay fair Hattonchâtel,  
Condemned four dreary years to pass,  
As in a prison cell,



In custody of jailers rude,  
    Who of its sculpture rare  
The church and cloisters did denude  
    And brutally lay bare,

In order that it might bedeck  
    An antiquary's wall,  
Or in some gloomy Glyptothek  
    Be lost for good and all.

No more the sound of bells was heard  
    From out the belfry high  
Their bronze must go to make more shells  
    With which to multiply

Bombardments such as had bestrown  
    The byways, once so clean,  
With shapeless heaps of tiles and stone,  
    Where humble homes had been,

Unroofed the church, profaned its choir,  
    Its sacred altar wrecked,  
And riddled the majestic spire  
    With cannonade unchecked

Until the little garrison  
    Must needs capitulate  
To foes, who, in comparison,  
    Were more than adequate

To seize, on that September day,  
    The village on the hill  
And hasten forward on their way,  
    Their purpose to fulfil.

At Apremont and Thiaucourt,  
    In all the country round,  
The lowly dwellings of the poor  
    Were levelled to the ground,

While onward the invaders went  
To capture Saint-Mihiel,  
And there complete the salient  
Wherein Hattonchâtel

Was doomed to suffer martyrdom,  
A victim to Kultur,  
Her former Mairie now become  
“Der Ortskommandantur,”

Her church a barracks and its tower  
An observation post,  
Her heights a witness to the power  
Of the Germanic host;

Her homeless cottagers despoiled  
Of all that they held dear,  
For which their ancestors had toiled  
And saved for many a year.

And so Hattonchâtel, in shame,  
Bowed helpless to the foe  
Until a fourth September came  
To terminate her woe.

A nation far across the sea  
At last had rubbed its eyes  
And roused itself from lethargy,  
Responsive to the cries

That put to shame neutrality  
And pharisaic cant,  
Recalling its true quality  
Of justice militant.

A million men declared that they  
Were not too proud to fight  
And crossed the ocean on their way  
To battle for the right.

They brought to France, with grief oppressed,  
    Fresh strength and eager hearts,  
The optimism of the West,  
    That buoyant hope imparts.

Enthusiastic, confident,  
    They made but one demand,—  
That into action they be sent  
    And under French command.

At Château Thierry, Belleau Wood  
    And in the dense Argonne,  
They played their part as heroes should  
    And victors' laurels won.

Then came their chance to fight as well  
    In a distinct campaign,  
To drive the foe from Saint-Mihiel  
    And liberate Lorraine.

So this is how it came to pass  
That fair Hattonchâtel  
Threw off the fetters that, alas,  
Had bound her all too well.

For, on a glad September day,  
(Thirteenth, to be exact,)  
The enemy had slipped away  
Before he was attacked;

The joyous sound of fife and drum  
Now heralds the advance  
Of troops in khaki clad, who come  
To take the hill for France.

Our glorious Stars and Stripes beside  
The tricolor they raise,  
While over all the countryside  
Rings out the "Marseillaise,"

And "Madelon" and "Over There,"  
In friendly rivalry,  
Contribute equally their share  
To swell the revelry.

But ah, the pity that no peal  
Of mad revolving bell  
Proclaims the turn of Fortune's wheel  
That saved Hattonchâtel!

The riddled church tower silent stands,  
Majestic as of yore,  
But, voiceless, waits for pious hands  
To give it speech once more.

Have courage, ancient belfry grim!  
The fateful sisters three  
E'er now have spun a web too dim  
For mortal eye to see,

But bards have ever scorned the odds  
That baffle human ken  
And, e'en as Homer saw the Gods  
Direct the acts of men,

Why should I not descry the thread  
That Clotho's spindle wrought,  
While Atropos, with scissors dread,  
Forbore to cut it short

And Lachesis did pull, with such  
Success, the filament,  
That soon 'twas long enough to touch  
Another continent,

Three thousand miles across the sea,  
Where, at the Gods' command,  
It twined itself full craftily  
Around a woman's hand.



With magic power it gently drew  
The owner of the hand  
From scenes of plenty, with a view  
To help this stricken land,

And so, inexorably led  
By Fate's resistless spell,  
She followed up the slender thread  
Until Hattonchâtel

In mutilated splendor lay  
Before her wond'ring gaze;—  
No time she lost,—that very day  
She planned a hundred ways

To remedy the damage wrought  
By war's infliction sore,  
And eagerly permission sought  
Its beauty to restore.

'Twas thus the lovely village won  
Its bountiful Marraine;  
With that accomplished, hereupon  
I interrupt my strain,

To finish it anon, in verse  
Less ponderous in tone,  
And now and then to intersperse  
Some lines that may atone

By help of pleasant anecdote  
And touch of humor gay,  
For aught of trite or tiresome note  
That lingers in my lay.

# EXPOSTULATION



## EXPOSTULATION

O MUSES nine!  
(Particularly Clio,)

I have been waiting for an opportunity,  
These many days, your temple to approach,  
With firm intent to cavil and reproach.

Have you forgotten with what importunity

I begged your help benign?

And yet you've let me flounder in the mire  
Of verbiage cacophonous

Time after time, and caused my readers to inquire:

"What is there in this poet to admire?

"'Tis rather rough on us

"To palm this off on us!"

O fie! O Clio!

You are the worst offender. Did you deem, perchance,  
That I was capable of such presumption  
As to attempt improvement on Guizot,  
By writing a new History of France

In limping verse?

If so, it was an ill-advised assumption  
And was responsible, I'd have you know,  
For all my wandering  
And frequent maundering,

If nothing worse.

I did so earnestly desire to write  
A sweet and lightsome lay;  
Then why did you permit me to indict,

In tone emphatic,

The Germans for their love of devastation?  
A ballad should not be a dissertation,  
Nor from the paths of poesy be led astray  
By aught pragmatic.

And tell me too,—how could you ever let  
Your worshipper importunate  
Repeat the words unfortunate  
Of our retiring Chief Magistrate?  
You must admit that you have never met  
A phrase so hackneyed and so very trite  
As that of his: “We are too proud to fight.”

Of course you’ve read,  
That is,—if Muses ever read, for I suspect  
You Muses take an undue time to muse  
And the diversion of a Muse is to amuse  
Herself by spinning lazily a dime  
To see if she must finally reveal a rhyme  
To some despairing poet. I correct,  
Therefore, my statement and will say

Perhaps you’ve read  
About a certain famous old Memorial,  
Into whose preparation editorial

King Charles’s head  
Insisted on intruding!—in like way,

When an American, who lived in Mexico,  
Attempts to write a ballad, speech or play,  
The chances are that he will never know  
When Woodrow Wilson's head will intervene  
And tempt him grievously to vent his spleen  
Upon that statesman cold.

You should not then withhold  
Your aid divine, but guide the erring pen  
Into the strait and narrow path again.

And now, O Muses fair, a final question  
Before you say you can no longer tarry,—  
My query covers not the least suggestion

Of any levity,—

Do any of you, ladies, ever carry,  
As a side line, if I may call it so,

The gift of Brevity?

For I would humbly ask that you bestow  
Upon your servant here a share of it.  
The proverb says it is the soul of Wit;



Alas, if that be true  
And probably it is,—what I have writ,  
So far, is witless  
And not a bit less  
For being witness  
Of many a struggle to reduce its length.

Well, well, I must not rue  
The past, but try with all my strength  
And with your help, henceforth to make amends,  
So here this mild expostulation ends.

On with the Ballad of Hattonchâtel  
And let us sing the Blessing of the Bell!



## PART II



## PART II

In springtime, when, with careless mirth  
And mischievous intent,  
The idle zephyrs roam the earth,  
Upon adventure bent,—

Before their amorous attack  
The modest poplars quail,  
Each little leaflet turns its back  
And grows distinctly pale;

But straightway curiosity  
Compels a stolen glance,  
With shy impetuosity  
They turn about and dance.

The fleecy clouds now drift apart  
And sunbeams dart between,  
To join the riot and impart  
More splendor to the scene;

They fleck the leaflets as they toss  
Upon their tender stems  
And, mirrored in their verdant gloss,  
Become as flashing gems.

So mad a bacchanale, 'tis clear,  
An orchestra requires,—  
The song-birds quickly volunteer  
To lend their feathered choirs;

The meadow flowers upward turn  
Their eyes in wonderment,  
With blushes red their faces burn,  
To see such merriment.

In sooth it is a great event  
For field and flower and tree,  
When zephyrs on adventure bent  
Steal softly o'er the lea !

In tune with Nature's gladsome mood,  
This smiling morn of May,  
Within his cloistered portal stood  
A priest, whose visage gay

His sober garb did contradict  
And marked him for a man  
Who knows that joy does not conflict  
With Life's predestined plan.

Beneath the cassock that so well  
Defines his sturdy frame,  
The Curé of Hattonchâtel  
Conceals a heart of flame

That burns with ardor quite as real  
As fired the saints of yore,  
And bids him work with holy zeal  
His parish to restore.

To make this an accomplished fact  
No method does he spurn,  
Persuasion, strategy and tact  
Are all employed in turn;

Or, failing by a clever ruse  
To gain his pious end,  
He knows when it is time to use  
The power the Church doth lend.

'Tis thus he dominates his flock  
And moulds them to his will,  
Nor fails the dullards' thrift to block  
With admirable skill.



If haply any doubts exist  
Of his discretion,—pray  
Let those who question duly list  
To all that passed this day.

Now comes a man upon the scene  
Of quite another kind,  
Whose knitted brow and visage lean  
Betrays a gloomy mind.

“Good morrow, Monsieur le Curé.”  
“Bon jour, Monsieur le Maire,  
“Why on this merry morn of May  
“Art so bowed down with care?

“Dost see the sunlight gild the trees?  
“Hast heard the mavis sing,  
“Or listened to the hum of bees,  
“Or felt the breath of Spring?

“If all these beauties cannot drive  
“The cobwebs from thy brain,  
“Know that this morning will arrive  
“Our generous Marraine,

“Her work beneficent to view,  
“Our humble life to share  
“And, doubtless, shower blessings new  
“Upon our village fair.”

The Mayor shook his head: “The trees  
“Will bear no fruit this year;  
“I have no hives to which the bees  
“Their homeward course may steer.

“Our benefactress, it is true,  
“Is loved by young and old,  
“To her munificence are due  
“Advantages untold;

“But while we value our Murraine  
“And laud her kind intent,  
“Her very benefits contain  
“The seeds of discontent.

“My prominence political  
“Subjects me to attacks  
“From persons who are critical  
“Of aught that swells the tax.

“In plain words, Monsieur le Curé,  
“’Tis all about the pump;  
“They pester me both night and day  
“And keep me on the jump,

“Because they find the new machine,  
“That they did hail with joy,  
“Consumes a lot of gasoline  
“And proves a costly toy.

“Each family will have to pay  
    “A franc per month at least,  
“And that’s too much, the people say,  
    “To water man or beast.

“You know the widow Lafontaine,  
    “Who’s eighty-three years old,—  
“She whines: ‘For threescore years and ten,  
    “‘In sun and rain and cold,

“‘I’ve brought the water up the hill  
    “‘And now I’m asked to pay,  
“‘That lazy girls their pails may fill  
    “‘In this new-fangled way!’

“And as for Hégésippe Godard  
    “And Aristide Bidou,—  
“They’ll pay the price for their pinard,—  
    “For water,—‘pas un sou!’

“Now by the . . . no, I must not swear,  
“Although you rouse my wrath;  
“I doubt if that old widow there  
“Has ever had a bath !

“And Hégésippe and Aristide  
“Of course the pump would flout,  
“They think that water never need  
“Be used inside or out.

“But theirs are not the only votes  
“That will the case decide,  
“We’ll force the water down their throats  
“And make them pay beside !”

“Mon frère,” a woman’s quiet voice  
Cut short the dialogue,  
“Instead of threatening, rejoice,  
“The town is all agog.

“The children say that they have seen,  
“Approaching from afar  
“In clouds of dust, what must have been  
“Our lady’s motor-car,  
  
“Because, from time to time, its speed  
“Was slackened, so they say,  
“While Monsieur Louis stopped to read  
“The guide-posts on the way !  
  
“Come then and let us welcome back  
“Our benefactress dear,—  
“Oh, ’tis a pity that we lack  
“A bell that she might hear  
  
“A-ringing in the belfry high  
“With loud and joyous peal,  
“To let her know, as she draws nigh,  
“The gratitude we feel.”

“My sister, I will find a way  
    “To get the needed bell;  
“Rome was not builded in a day,  
    “Nor yet Hattonchâtel.

“Before the trees their foliage shed  
    “And autumn’s glories pass,  
“A bell will call thee from thy bed  
    “To early morning mass.

“But on this day the motor-horn  
    “The church-bell must replace;  
“A smile of welcome will adorn  
    “Our Mayor’s careworn face,

“The village folk will flock to see  
    “The motor climb the hill;  
“The boys and girls will voice their glee  
    “In accents high and shrill.”

The Curé's words describe so well  
What happened on that day,  
That naught remains for me to tell,  
Except, perhaps, to say

That subjects seldom have displayed  
To reigning sovereign  
A truer homage than was paid  
Hattonchâtel's Mairaine.

But even as in days of old  
The subjects' loyalty  
Oft owed its ardor to the gold  
Dispensed by royalty,

Among the village folk were some,  
Who ventured to propose  
A meeting to which all should come,  
Particularly those



Who thought that water must be free,  
Where'er 'twas made to flow,  
And on the hill its cost should be  
Just what it was below.

With this sophistic argument  
They opened the debate,  
In hope of aid benevolent  
The pump to operate,

Thereby insuring the defense  
Of each one's bas de laine  
And putting the entire expense  
Upon their chère Marraïne.

The village socialist began,  
With fiery eloquence,  
Insisting on the right of Man  
To all three elements:

Fire, air and water, not to speak  
• Of many things beside,  
Of which the strong deprive the weak,  
To swell their bourgeois pride.

“My fellow townsmen, why delude  
“Yourself and so permit  
“A little thing like altitude  
“To cloud your mother wit?

“Does air less free to all become,  
“The higher the ascent?  
“Why then should water differ from  
“Its sister element?”

The Curé smiled and said, “My friend,  
“You must admit that air,  
“For every league that you ascend,  
“Grows constantly more rare;

“But ere we won the loving care  
“Of our Marraine, you know,  
“No element was half so rare  
“As that of  $H_2O$  !

“Forgive my language chemical;  
“Your discourse erudite  
“And argument polemical  
“Did like reply invite.

“Now, children, to be serious,  
“I am most deeply grieved;  
“There’s nothing so mysterious  
“In what you have conceived.

“You know the water’s worth to you  
“A hundred times its cost,  
“But now it’s here you grudge each sou  
“And call it money lost.

“I’m going to tell a bit of news  
“That you will hear with glee,  
“And if it does not change your views  
“Mistaken I shall be.

“You know how all of us did prize  
“The bell the Germans stole,  
“But do you fully realize  
“The danger to the soul

“Of always being late to mass,  
“For lack of warning bell?  
“I’ll let your tardinesses pass,  
“If what I have to tell

“Awakens generosity  
“In your ignoble minds.”  
By this time, curiosity  
Their calculation blinds

And all would readily subscribe  
A franc or two at least,  
If by so doing they could bribe  
The tantalizing priest

His wondrous secret to divulge;  
So now the holy man  
Resolved their humor to indulge  
And with these words began:

“The piece of news I have to tell  
“Will fill your hearts with shame . . .

“Our good Marraine will give a Bell  
“To bear her gracious name,

“And when it comes from overseas,  
“If I do rightly guess,

“The Bishop of the diocese  
“Her splendid gift will bless.

“In truth, ’twill be a holiday  
    “That none will e’er forget,  
“When people come from miles away  
    “To see our town en fête.”

The Curé’s speech was hailed with cheers;  
    The widow Lafontaine  
Is first to quaver, midst her tears,  
    “Long live our good Marraïne !

“May I but live to see the day !”  
    The Mayor’s lines relax;  
He knows there’ll be no more delay  
    To meet the water tax;

And even Aristide Bidou  
    And Hégésippe Godard  
Become enthusiastic too  
    And join in the huzza.

How did the Lady in the case  
Comport herself the while?  
At first amusement lit her face  
And then a puzzled smile,

Becoming worried as her friend,  
The masterful Curé,  
Drew slowly nearer to the end  
Of what he had to say.

Till then, it must be understood,  
No talk of bell she'd heard,  
But, being in a sporting mood,—  
She graciously concurred.

Thus did the wily man of God  
Bejuggle tout le monde,  
To lovely woman or to clod  
His arts did correspond.

“Chère Miss, what shall we call the Bell?”

He asked, unblushingly,

“Your name, though it describes you well,

“Is quite too short, you see;

“Besides, no patronymic saint,

“As far as I can tell

“From records with which I’m acquaint,

“Was canonized as ‘Belle.’

“Two syllables, then, let us add,

“To make it ‘Isabelle,’

“And, if another name you had,

“’Twould round it out quite well.”

“My mother’s name was Sarah, sir,

“And, if you so incline,

“’Twould please me much to honor her

“And link her name with mine.”



“No better name, chère Mademoiselle,  
“Could possibly be found  
“Than that of SARAH ISABELLE  
“To match the Bell’s sweet sound.”

Thus, even as the busy bee  
The shining hour improves,  
The priest, with equal industry,  
Each obstacle removes.

The people, too, display a zeal  
They never knew before,  
The ravages of war to heal,  
Their altars to restore.

The scattered stones in piles are set,  
The village streets made clear  
And all is ready for the fête  
As autumn days draw near.

Now let us hasten to Lorraine  
In time to see how gay  
Hattonchâtel and its Mairaine  
Can make a holiday.

When Chanticleer the dawn proclaimed  
In accents Rostand-esque,  
As France's emblem, he declaimed  
These phrases picturesque:

"Men of Hattonchâtel, I pray  
"You, hearken to my voice,  
"Le jour de gloire est arrivé!  
"Be thankful and rejoice.

"Let past rebuffs of adverse fate  
"Your present joy enhance  
"And show the strangers at your gate  
"The bravery of France!"

I did not hear this, for I slept  
Long after it was light,  
(I've seldom seen the dawn, except  
When I've stayed out all night)

But all the villagers, I'm told,  
Distinctly heard him crow  
And his injunctions young and old  
With joy obeyed, I know,

For, when we visitors arrived,  
The revelry and fun,  
Of which they were so long deprived,  
Already had begun.

Beribboned maidens thronged the lanes  
And, so to dazzle more  
The eyes of their respective swains,  
Coquettishly they wore

The lace-trimmed bonnet of Lorraine  
Or black Alsatian bow,  
Either of which will turn the brain  
Of any man, you know.

A like temptation to entrap  
Extended to the old,  
For Mère Lafontaine's ruffled cap  
Was wondrous to behold;

The Curé's sister, most demure,  
Displayed the silken gown  
A victim to her charms mature  
Had brought her from the town.

But none possessed the panoply  
Of Sarah Isabelle  
Beneath the flowered canopy  
Enshrining her so well

A mantle of the richest lace  
Her shoulder overhung;  
She wore it with a quiet grace  
And silent was her tongue,

Like to a maid, who goes arrayed  
In garb of purest white  
To first communion, half afraid  
Her lesson to recite.

Now to the church the people pass  
And in its roofless nave  
The Bishop of Verdun says mass,  
In honor of the brave,

Who deemed no death more glorious  
Than that they freely chose,  
So France might be victorious  
And triumph o'er her foes.

In great cathedrals, where the light  
Through jewelled panes invades  
The gloom and, with a radiance bright,  
Illumes the pillared shades,

One marvels and is filled with awe  
Of human skill and art,  
But those, who on that morning saw,  
Through rafters torn apart,

The sunlight from the cloudless sky  
Upon the altar shine,  
Believed that straight from God on high  
Descended grace divine.

The service ends. . . . In eagerness  
A nearer view to gain,  
All crowd to see the Bishop bless  
The gift of their Mairaine.

At first, in phrases eloquent,  
He recapitulates  
The Lady's deeds beneficent  
And then he consecrates

Her lace-clad namesake, whom a pale  
Gray mist of incense sweet  
Enfolds, as with a perfumed veil,  
Her toilette to complete.

To disregard these sacred rites  
Would rob the Bell of power  
To drive away the evil sprites,  
Who fly about the tower.

And so she meekly held her tongue  
(With splendid self-command,  
Considering her sex . . .) till rung  
By Monseigneur's own hand.

Ah, with what joy the people heard  
The long-expected note !  
The hearts of all were thrilled and stirred  
By thought of days remote,

When bells a higher value bore  
Than weight of bronze alone,  
And shriek of shell and cannon's roar  
Were sounds as yet unknown.

Like children, who from dreams awake  
And soon forget their fear,  
The Bell's familiar tone did make  
The war less real appear.

And how delighted, then, they were  
To hear the Donor fair  
Repeat the sound and, after her  
In turn, Monsieur le Maire !



Now that the Bell is duly blessed,  
We cross the narrow way  
To where a Tribune has been dressed  
With flags and streamers gay;

The Stars and Stripes make gallant show,  
The Tricolore as well.  
(’Twas on this day, two years ago,  
We took Hattonchâtel.)

Religion having had its hour,  
’Tis fitting that the State,  
Through both departments of its power,  
Should now participate.

First General Berthélot will pay  
“Hommage à l’Amérique,”  
And after him the Sous-Préfet  
Of Commercy will speak.

Less easy than when under fire,  
The soldier reads his speech;  
He has but one sincere desire,—  
The end of it to reach.

The Sous-Préfet believes that Art  
Is long and Life is brief;  
His present chance to play the part  
Of orator-in-chief

May be his last and so, in heat  
And length of brilliant phrase,  
No rival can with him compete  
Except Apollo's rays,

Which grow in strength as noon draws near  
And pauses there are none  
Until, between the two, we fear  
Our brains are too well done.

The Bishop mops his shining brow  
And moves his lips in prayer;  
The General wonders why and how  
He came in this "galère."

But all things come to him who waits  
And with the "Marseillaise"  
The ceremony terminates.  
All go their several ways:

The peasants to their homes, to eat  
A bountiful repast,  
That their Morraine, with forethought sweet,  
Has sent to break their fast;

The guests to gather at her board,  
Where viands do abound,  
For which Lucullus would have poured  
Libations on the ground.



But not alone the sense of taste  
Will here be gratified,  
For, when at table we are placed,  
A panorama wide

Of all the plain from west to east,  
Beneath an azure sky,  
Provides a veritable feast  
Of beauty for the eye.

Nor is the ear to be deprived  
Of pleasure's share to-day;  
This very moment have arrived  
The bold chasseurs à pied;

With trumpets flashing in the sun  
They play the "Sambre et Meuse,"  
Whose strain the heart of every one  
To wild emotion stirs.

Its echoes scarce had died away  
To silence, when occurred  
The crowning beauty of the day,  
For suddenly was heard

A rush of melody so clear,  
Tumultuous and strong,  
It flooded all the atmosphere  
With one triumphant song.

Peal followed peal in reckless race,  
The harmony to swell,  
And now we hear the populace  
Cry out "The Bell! the Bell!"

The company, in great amaze,  
At one another stare,  
Then stand with one accord and raise  
Their glasses high in air,

To drink, in unison, the health  
Of SARAH ISABELLE,  
Who, with an unsuspected stealth,—  
But how they cannot tell,—

Has left her comfortable bower,  
Where they beheld her last,  
And climbed the stairway of the tower  
With daring unsurpassed.

Suspicion cannot help but fall  
Upon the good Curé,  
For he was at the root of all  
That happened on this day;

And, if he could no longer wait  
To make the welkin ring,  
Then wherefore should he hesitate  
Or balk at anything?

'Twas easy for him to invite  
Some youths among his flock  
To hoist the Bell and gain the right  
To make it sway and rock.

And so the Angelus was rung;  
The silence of six years  
Was broken, and the people hung  
With mingled smiles and tears

Upon the sound so sweet and rare,  
Then all their hands did fold  
And said the short familiar prayer,  
As they had done of old.

Oh, ancient belfry, grim and gray,  
Thy patience is repaid;  
Destruction now has had its day  
And pious hands have laid

Foundations for an era new.

Those fateful sisters three  
Have now fulfilled and proven true  
The minstrel's prophecy.

No more wilt thou, in dumb despair,  
Man's wanton wastage face,  
But with thy new-found voice declare  
Religion's saving grace.

So, ancient belfry, tall and gray,  
Dismiss the minstrel then,  
Ring down the curtain on his play  
And bid him drop his pen;

For otherwise no one can tell  
How long he might extend  
The Ballad of Hattonchâtel,  
Or when he'd reach

THE END.



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